

Coburn Amendment #93- Implement Presidential Recommendation to divert nonessential National Heritage Area funding to higher priority activities

Coburn amendment #93 would strike an extraneous provision reauthorizing 12 outdated National Heritage Areas, implement President Obama's recommendation of reducing low-priority National Heritage Area funding by roughly 50 percent, and redirect \$6 million in funds towards preserving visitor services and maintenance at our National Parks

The 12 National Heritage Areas identified for reauthorization are emblematic of the concerns that the Administration has with the program

- While there is not a federal statute authorizing National Heritage Areas (NHAs), the Department of Interior defines a NHA as “a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally-distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography”¹
- There is no criteria for establishing a NHA other than being designated by a congressional earmark
- The National Park Service supports the NHAs through federal recognition, technical assistance, and \$17.4 million in federal funding that serve as “seed money” to help local coordinating entities get a jump-start for local efforts²
- Instead of becoming temporary programs directed towards self-sufficiency as originally intended, NHAs have turned into permanent entities that continue to grow in number and funding amount
- The Obama administration pointed out this concern in the FY2013 budget which stated that “managers of NHAs continue to rely heavily on Federal funding, **although the program was not intended as a pathway to long-term Federal funding for individual Heritage Areas**”³
- All 12 of the NHAs proposed for reauthorization in this appropriations bill have existed beyond their original sunset dates, with 11 being established more than 16 years ago (all established in 1996), and the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor has existed for more than 25 years (established in 1986)⁴
- These 12 NHAs have already received a total of \$111.75 million in federal tax dollars, more than half of the total \$203 million ever spent on the 49 NHAs
- One of the NHAs set for reauthorization, Blackstone River Valley Commission, created a nonprofit to prepare for the next phase and the comments from the chairwoman show a seamless transition: “We would obviously have preferred to

¹ <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/INDEX.HTM>

² <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/INDEX.HTM>

³ http://home.nps.gov/applications/budget2/FY13_NPS_Greenbook.pdf

⁴ <http://www.crs.gov/pages/Reports.aspx?PRODCODE=RL33462&Source=search>

receive another extension, but fortunately made sure to have a Plan B in place, which can now go into effect. As a result, the Corridor program can continue with minimal disruption to ongoing projects and to our many partners."⁵

Coburn Amendment #93 would implement the President's request to reduce the NHA program budget by 50 percent

- In the FY2013 Cuts, Consolidations, and Savings list, the Administration proposed a roughly 50 percent decrease in funding for the NHA program
- In making this recommendation, the Administration cited the need to focus available resources towards higher priority initiatives over "lower-priority grants" to NHAs⁶
- The National Park budget stated "the proposed reduction supports the long-term sustainability of National Heritage Areas and the continued importance of Federal seed money for less mature areas"
- The Congressional Budget Office(CBO) has recommended eliminating the National Heritage Area program in its deficit reduction budget options⁷
- Coburn Amendment #93 would enact the Administration's recommendations by reducing Nation Heritage Partnership program funding by \$8.1 million

Coburn Amendment #93 would redirect funds towards more pressing budgetary needs

- Citing "staffing reductions resulting from sequestration", the Administration discontinued public tours and closed the White House visitors center effective March 9th, 2013
- Yellowstone National Park reported that budget constraints may delay their opening by multiple weeks due to not being able to run the snow plows⁸
- Other National Parks have reported closures in campgrounds, reduced maintenance capabilities and long lines for visitor interpretive activities⁹
- This amendment would take the \$6 million in savings garnered from implementing President Obama's recommendation and direct it towards visitor services and maintenance needs at our National Parks, for example reopening the White House tours and using snow clearing equipment to open Yellowstone National Park on time

⁵ <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs176/1103611975214/archive/1111286981015.html>

⁶ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2013/assets/ccs.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/102xx/doc10294/08-06-budgetoptions.pdf>

⁸ http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/yellowstone-gets-real-about-budget-cuts/2013/03/10/fdc3e5f4-868f-11e2-9d71-f0feafdd1394_story.html

⁹ <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/03/sequester-squeeze-delays-openings-cuts-campgrounds-at-national-parks/>